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ABSTRACT

Teachers often regard educational and psychological research as irrelevant to the actualities of classroom teaching. There are many ways that researchers can increase their audience among teachers. More research should be done in the classroom with the teacher acting as a co-investigator. Applied developmental research can increase the base of knowledge. This base of knowledge should include but not be limited to studying methods of classroom management and lesson planning, establishing a good learning environment, evaluating student performance, studying effective instruction, and understanding how students learn. More research should be directed to specific disciplines and there is a need for specific suggestions for bridging the gap between theory and practice. (JD)

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Educational and Psychological Research Implications for Classroom Teaching

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Educational and psychological research are of limited use if they are not applied by the classroom teacher. For them to be of use, researchers must address the teachers' perceptions of research and researchers, they must understand why teachers do not make use of research findings, and they must discover what researchers can do to develop a willing audience among teachers.

Teachers have many different perceptions of research and researchers, but they do share several general ideas. Most research is done by psychologists and sociologists who have little classroom experience (Day, 1987), therefore, teachers see a gap between research and practice. Research is biased towards the scientific rather than the practical. The average classroom teacher finds much research to be vague and lacking in credibility (Eaker & Huffman, 1982). There seems to be a tension between research and teaching (Cross, 1988). From the teacher's view, research is "too far removed" from the classroom (Billups & Rauth, 1987, in Fleming, 1988, p. 1). It does not concern itself enough with teaching.

Why do teachers "ignore" research? Perhaps "ignore" is too strong a word. Some researchers see the classroom teacher as close-minded and resistant to change (Zahorik, 1984). In fact the teacher is faced with myriad problems, among them a lack of time and an overload of information. Because of this, teachers focus on their most immediate duty - teaching. Their day is not long enough nor their energy abundant enough to sort through long research reports, particularly if the reports: 1) are in highly technical, scientific terms and 2) do not deal with some very

practical, immediate concern in their class. Eaker and Huffman (1982, p.37) point out that "teachers are often expected to change very personal and complex teaching behaviors by simply reading research findings. . . " Teachers need time to understand the research, they need specific guides to adapting the research to their classes, and they need the opportunity to apply new ideas in their classrooms. Teachers need an opportunity to discuss relevant research findings with their colleagues, and three or four in-service meetings a year will not suffice. In short, teachers are not ignoring research. They simply do not have time for something they see as irrelevant.

There are numerous ways that researchers can increase their audience among teachers. Several authors support Cole's (1988, p.1) suggestion that the teacher become a co-investigator as the teacher and researcher work toward a "common goal of increased understanding." More research should be dome in the classroom. Mason and Allen (1986) call this "applied developmental research" and see it as increasing the base of knowledge. This base of knowledge should include but not be limited to studying methods of classroom management and lesson planning, establishing a good learning environment, evaluating student performance, studying effective instruction, and understanding how students learn (Fleming, 1988; Green, 1983). More research should be directed to specific disciplines (Shulman, 1987; Zahorik, 1984). There is a need for specific suggestions for bridging the gap between theory and practice, reports such as how to apply cognitive

findings about learning to reading , math or language classes. Research could help teachers base their instructional strategies on the students' cognitive development (Reilly, 1989), and it should enable teachers to help their students learn more effectively.

If research were conducted and disseminated so that the classroom teacher obtained relevant content-specific information, its implications would be widespread. Teachers would be better able to respond to students' needs. They would know the best methods of communicating their subject matter to their particular students. They would know how best to organize their classes and their lessons. They would see the relationship between all the various aspects of their class and the students' learning. Researchers need to study what is useful to teachers. Teachers need access to research they can understand - research that does not require technical expertise, and they need the opportunity to design and implement their own research.

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